The Presbyterian Hospital

SAN JUAN, PORTO RICO

Woman's Board of Home Missions
of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.
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SAN JUAN, PORTO RICO

ONE SKETCH FROM MANY

THE Presbyterian Hospital at San Juan, Porto Rico, differs from other hospitals in that it does not only medical but also missionary work. This statement, bare though it is, means two very vital things: that it affords a place where the poor and destitute in time of sickness can receive proper medical treatment under the influence of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that it trains native girls to become skilled nurses to care for their own people throughout the island. And this is what the hospital with its beautiful big building and adequate modern equipment is doing today, caring sympathetically and lovingly for the poor and needy and preparing Porto Rican girls for a life of full, rich service.

Beginning of Medical Work in Porto Rico

The hospital of today, however, was not the beginning of the work, but instead represents the steady growth of an idea projected eighteen years ago with nothing more pretentious than Dr. Greene's pill bottles. The story of those early days is a simple one: As Dr. J. Milton Greene, Superintendent of Missions, worked among the poor of Santurce, there was never a day that he did not meet those who were so sick and miserable that no spiritual help was possible. The story of the Great Physician could mean nothing to those who, though diseased and suffering, knew no real physician. Day by day Dr. Greene became more and more distressed over the pitiable condition of the poor people and particularly so when he learned that the doctor, who, as city physician, should have devoted himself to the alleviation of the frightful and heart-rending suffering so apparent, was more interested in his own amusement than in relieving the suffering of the poverty-stricken and helpless. Indeed, except for the one clinic conducted by a Spanish doctor who really loved his work and therefore was glad to help rich and poor alike, Dr. Greene found that nothing in a medical way was being done for the

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poor of Porto Rico,—and there were many of them, more than today and much poorer. Stirred beyond endurance by his daily contact with misery and disease, Dr. Greene asked that a medical missionary be sent from the United States to care for these poor people. But he did not wait until the physician arrived. Something had to be done at once, so he purchased a few bottles of pills and tried to do as much good as possible. Those few bottles of pills were thus in reality the beginning of the medical work on the island.

Dr. Greene's appeal for help for his poor people did not go unanswered, for in January, 1901, Dr. Grace Williams Atkins, now Mrs. Holmes, was sent to Porto Rico. No sooner had she landed than she began work by opening a dispensary at Santurce. The immediate response of the sick who crowded the limited quarters proved that there was a call for the service she was there to render; those who came discovered through her ministry a real meaning in the word charity, for skillfully and patiently with insufficient equipment, without nurse or hospital, she relieved suffering, operated and cared for wounds, crowding into each day the fullest possible measure of service and making it all the embodiment of Christian love and her ideal of what a Christian life should be.

Nor was the work entirely confined to health of body, for every patient who came to the clinic heard the story of Christ and His love, was asked to unite in prayer with the missionary, and urged to attend the regular church services.

During the first year 6,005 cases were treated at the dispensary and 805 calls made on patients in their homes. The work grew so rapidly and the need for it became so overwhelming that a second nurse was doctor necessary. Dr. Jane Harris, "a real missionary as well as a conscientious physician", was sent down to join Dr. Atkins. Soon the two found themselves as busy as the one had been, and increasingly they found their best efforts frustrated by the lack of any place where patients could have skilled care all the time. Indeed, as the work daily grew, a hospital became more and more a necessity. Both Dr. Atkins and Dr. Harris felt this and repeatedly they urged that a hospital be built. The appeals they wrote met at last with a response and through the generosity of those who could not see suffering whether of body or of spirit go unrelieved, the Woman's Board was able in 1904 to erect three buildings—a hospital,

a dispensary and an administration building. To these was added later a building containing a nurses' home and a kitchen.

This first hospital meant the opening of a new field of service that was in time to affect the entire island morally, physically and spiritually. Indeed one who has been in Porto Rico for years has written: "Municipal and charity hospitals as they exist today have practically all been built during the past fifteen years. Medical service will make a most interesting and vital chapter in the history of Porto Rico, and all honor must be given to the American surgeons of the Army and Navy, the Public Health Service and the local sanitation board as well as to many generous-hearted native physicians who have added each year to the efficiency of these institutions. But it is not too much to say that our own hospital has stood as an inspiration to those public-spirited men".

The Work of Today

Such was the simple beginning of the work of eighteen years ago that resulted eventually in a real hospital. But just as the clinic alone proved inadequate and had to be supplemented by a hospital, so the small wooden hospital, poorly arranged, inadequately equipped and year by year showing the effect of climate and insect life, had to give way to a larger hospital to meet the appeal of the growing numbers who applied for treatment.

Through the enthusiastic response of Presbyterian women to a need so apparent, a generous contribution from the Board of Home Missions, and an appreciative gift from Porto Rico itself, a new hospital was made possible—a hospital larger, more adequate in every way and better equipped than the old hospital had been, and in fact than any hospital on the island. The architect writes of it as a real mission: "The fifteen-year-old Presbyterian Hospital in its new home on the ocean front near San Juan might quite truly be called a Spanish mission. The simple round-arched stucco exterior with gables of a certain character and a touch of red tile roof constitute *Spanish* Mission in style of architecture; the medical and surgical work is done with a real missionary spirit; the patients in tradition and language are largely *Spanish*."

The hospital may be described as a "general hospital"; it provides an operating suite of rooms, and facilities for both medical and surgical

LOOKING DOWN A CORRIDOR

treatment of men, women and children, and includes a dispensary easily capable of handling three thousand patients a month and a nurses' training school for native Porto Rican young women. The normal capacity of the hospital for bed patients is sixty-four, which in emergency and without inconvenience can be expanded to eighty-eight. There are also, of course, accommodations for the twenty-four student nurses, also the staff and employees to the number of thirty-six, making one hundred and forty-eight as the total bed capacity of the hospital. Strange to say, even the increase in the number of beds from forty-five to sixty-four does not today meet the many demands made on the hospital, for no sooner was the capacity increased than the sick seemed to increase in numbers also and the waiting list continually grows longer. However, no better testimonial to the need and success of the work can be desired or given.

Only a doctor can appreciate what the change from the old to the new meant to staff, patients and to the efficiency of the work. The phy-

sician in charge after a year in the building wrote: "A few of the more striking features of the new building may be mentioned. In the first place every one has to make his or her business known in the office. No one can fully appreciate the force of this simple statement except those who visited the old hospital and saw how possible it was for any one to enter any part of the building whether his coming was impelled by business or curiosity. The effect on a sick, nervous patient of having a strange, dirty man come into the room, trying to sell a chicken or a straw hat, can be imagined. Patients and staff appreciate this change. Separate from the front entrance, is another for clinic patients. Here is a pleasant balcony and large waiting room with comfortable seats. Before, the majority of these patients were obliged to stand or sit on the floor, and toward the last so many came that there was hardly room to crowd them in even in that fashion. As many arrive in the morning and have to wait for the clinic in the afternoon, this comfort, now possible in waiting, means much to them. Facilities for the care of the patients have been greatly improved. The wards are light, well ventilated, and cool. Comfortable beds have replaced the folding native cots. The beds for children have been increased from seven to twelve, with enough space for several more should they be desired. A 'quiet room' has already proved its usefulness by permitting isolation of several noisy patients who were disturbing others. . . ."

And the patients—To the three wards for men, women and children come patients not only from San Juan but from all parts of Porto Rico and the surrounding islands without regard to religious belief,—Santa Domingo, St. Thomas, Vieques, and Culebra. A charge is made from one dollar a day down to a dollar for the entire treatment according to the circumstances of the patient. However, no one who needs hospital care is refused admission when there is a vacant bed even though he cannot pay. This little picture of the clinic patients is very vivid: "It is now only ten o'clock and the clinic begins at one, but already there are two or three dozen people waiting; these two or three dozen have walked all night arriving in town before dawn. Some have been to market on pony-back to carry their bananas, coffee or beans. They have brought a bottle of coffee and a little loaf of pointed hard crusted bread for their breakfast. Others who will come later will wait and wait all day, or until their number is called and their turn comes. . . . The

PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITA

ITAL, SAN JUAN, PORTO RICO

PATIENTS FROM EVERY SORT OF HOME COME TO THE HOSPITAL

people come from the towns and county districts within a radius of twenty-five to thirty-five miles. They come in 'jitneys', on horseback, in the trolley car, or on foot; those who cannot walk are brought on hammocks or chairs. Most of these can pay something for their consultations and medicine." In addition to these, there are many Porto Ricans and Americans who are making a temporary or permanent residence on the island who can afford to pay a reasonable amount for hospital treatment; for such as these there are a few private rooms. For the accommodations and care they are as grateful as the poorest peon from the country.

Nor is the care of those who come to the hospital confined to the body, for He who said 'Heal the sick' said also 'Preach the gospel', and just as this was done in the early days, so is it being done now. The native pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Santurce visits the hospital twice a week and holds services for the clinic patients and in the men's ward; the Bible woman from the same church holds services in the women's ward. Those patients who can read are given a Bible or a portion of it

DR. HILDRETH PERFORMING AN OPERATION

to use while they are in the hospital and to take to their homes if they desire. In this way the Bible is given to those to whom previously it was a closed book.

When the medical work in Porto Rico grew from a clinic into a hospital it was confronted with a problem that only hospital workers in mission lands can fully understand—the problem of nurses. Dr. Atkins tells of the first nurse in the training school: "She had been one of the first patients. She was then a widow of one month with four children to support—the youngest born the day before I arrived in San Juan. She was black, could read and write and had a real gift for nursing. During the first two years of my work here I constantly met her among her neighbors, helping them in times of sickness, and promised her a place in the training school. I wish you could have seen her the morning that she arrived, barefooted and ragged, with a few possessions tied in a bundle which she carried on her head. She expected uniforms and came pre-

pared to receive them . . . an example of raw material, (she) has been nursing ever since she left the training school. She owns her own home, is educating her children well; one is a school teacher and one a carpenter. She nurses for all the best physicians, is never without a case, and has visited Spain and Switzerland with a patient. The making of such raw material into competent nurses meant working, watching and correcting night and day. There was much to contend with . . . Porto Rican girls were not accustomed to menial tasks. If a girl had sufficient education to be a nurse she would not do the servile work necessary, or if she were willing to do the work she was not able to learn the lesson; and, too, it was hard to translate all of those lessons into Spanish." Of this year's class the superintendent gives a different picture:

"We had seven in our graduating class of pupil nurses and every one had a position in view before graduating. They took the examination that corresponds to that of the State Board in the States. Two of our American nurses have given instruction in practical nursing to classes of Ameri-

THE NEW CHILDREN'S WARD

SOME OF THE CHILDREN

can and Porto Rican ladies who are interested in the Red Cross. These girls are so much better able to teach sanitation—to keep the houses clean and to let in the sunshine and fresh air . . . Four of the seven graduates of this year's class have been in charge of different departments of our hospital work. Let me tell you about them: Erudina is now our instructor of a class of fourteen probationers. She is doing all the class work in demonstration, and this afternoon I listened to a two hours' quiz on practical nursing, and must say that it was as enthusiastic a class as I have ever seen, and they seem to have a very good knowledge of the subject as far as they have gone. Their practical work is very good also. This girl, as they all do, speaks English very well. Ana had the best papers of all the nurses who took the examination in San Juan. She is head nurse of all the clinic out-patients, operating-room, operating-room supplies and sterilizing. Dolores is head nurse in the women's semi-private and women's free ward, has special supervision of all the serving-rooms and relieves other head nurses. Manuela supervises the children's ward, the men's ward and the men's semi-private ward. The contrast be-

tween Manuela and the other nurses is very striking, for all the others are brunettes, while Manuela's eyes are blue and her hair light, she being of pure Spanish ancestry. Manuela is one of the most devoted Christians among our nurses. Out of the graduating class five of the seven are Protestants, and all of them have attended a Protestant church during their training here."

It is interesting to note just what use the native girls who have been graduated since 1909 have made of their training; the following table shows:

1909

Andrea Gomez	Married	Arecibo, Porto Rico.
Francisca Ramos	Rye Hospital Dispensary	Mayaguez, Porto Rico.
Isabel Marquez	Head Nurse, Municipal Hospital	Guayama, Porto Rico.
Rosa Gonzalez	Asst. Supt., St. Luke's Hospital	Ponce, Porto Rico.

1910

Beatriz Arroyo	Private Nursing	Aguadilla, Porto Rico.
Dolores Velez	Married	Lajas, Porto Rico.
Emiliana Ramirez	Married	Address unknown.

1911

Ana Maria Rodriguez	Dead	
Francisca Jimenez	Private Nursing	Ponce, Porto Rico.
Tomasa Fernandez	Married	Address unknown.

1912

Josefa Martell	Rye Hospital	Mayaguez, Porto Rico.
Josefa Diaz	Private Nursing	New York City.
Clotilde Rodriguez	Married	Juana, Diaz.
Teresa Montes	Married	Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

1913

Carmen Ferrer	Married	San Juan, Porto Rico.
Juana Maldonado	Private Nursing	Tulsa, Oklahoma.
Modesta Nunoz	Married	San Lorenzo, Porto Rico.
Petra Maldonado	Children's Hospital	San Juan, Porto Rico.

1914

Anita Ortiz	Married	San Juan, Porto Rico.
Maria Luisa Carlos	Married	San Sebastian, Porto Rico.
Lena Jason	Student, Scotia Seminary	Concord, North Carolina.
Carmen Archilla	Hospital for the Blind	Ponce, Porto Rico.
Margarita Ruiz	Private Nursing	Ponce, Porto Rico.

1915

Librada Miranda	Head Nurse, St. Luke's Hospital	Ponce, Porto Rico.
Sabina Ramos	Married	
Maria Nieves	Head Nurse, Miramar Clinic	San Juan, Porto Rico.

1916

Olimpia Pena	Head Nurse, St. Luke's Hospital	Ponce, Porto Rico.
Juana Aldao	Supt. Municipal Hosp.	Puerta Plata, St. Domingo.
Eulalia Martinez	Head Nurse, Quarantine Hospital	Barceloneta, Porto Rico.
Rafaela Velasco	Susoni's Clinic	Arecibo, Porto Rico.

1917

Ramona Guzman	District Nursing	San Juan, Porto Rico.
Adela Pena	Private Nursing	Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.
M. Hebrants	Head Nurse, Presbyterian Hospital	San Juan, Porto Rico.

Had the hospital rendered Porto Rico no other service than just this one to the native girl, its contribution to the island would still have been incalculable: through it there have come to her a new independence of spirit created by a knowledge of her task and her own ability to perform it, a new view of life and her part in it, and a vision of true service that alone could give her heart for the long years of training and send her out as a district nurse into homes of filth and disease to lighten the burden of her people.

There have been many testimonies to the work the hospital is doing but probably none more beautiful than the following from a missionary of another denomination:

"We have depended upon the Presbyterian Hospital for the care of our sick missionaries and native people . . . I was delighted with the general atmosphere of the hospital when I was there for a recent operation. On Sunday morning I had the nurse take me in a wheel chair over to 'the wards' where the people who can pay but little or nothing are treated, to hear Dr. Hildreth lead us in devotional service. He has good use of the Spanish and his tender prayers, his reading of the Scripture and his talk supplemented by the singing of the choir of nurses did us all good. Think of being able to hear one's doctor pray like that!"

To the hospital there have come thousands—the records for 1901 show

6,910 patients; for 1908, 7,787; for 1910, 12,262; for 1918, 30,270; the total records for the eighteen years of medical service on the island show approximately 227,000. On health of body and of spirit depends the highest development whether of man or of nation. The gift of Presbyterian women to Porto Rico through their hospital has been a finer womanhood, a stronger manhood and a healthier nation.

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